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Baltimore District

The Corps'pondent

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Residents ask questions of investigation at meeting

by Maj. Brian Plaisted
Spring Valley Operations Officer

Many of you attended the Spring Valley community meeting on Feb. 13 at Sibley Hospital, where a number of concerns and questions were raised about the Corps' ongoing investigation of the neighborhood.

Although we attempted to answer your questions, there were several we could not. I want to assure you that your questions are important to us, and we are working hard to get you answers.

We thought it might be helpful if we provided some of the questions and answers discussed during the meeting. Check our website at <http://www.nab.usace.army.mil/projects/WashingtonDC/springvalley.htm> in the section entitled "Meetings" for the minutes of the meeting.

The following agencies were represented at the meeting and participated in the discussions: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, District of Columbia Health Department, U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine (CHPPM) and the Army Corps of Engineers.

Question: What assurance can you give us this time that you will find all the contamination and ordnance and clean it up correctly?

Answer: D.C. Health response—We're using the very best science and technology possible. Environmental Photographic Interpretation Center (EPIC) has one of the top people in the world reviewing the aerial photographs. We also have Lockheed Martin analyzing still photographs. EPIC has recently done a flyover with a spectrographic camera looking for

areas with stressed vegetation. A board of six to eight doctors within D.C. Health is looking at health surveys. The mayor is appointing a board of physicians and environmental scientists to oversee the work that D.C. Health is doing with the health survey.

Question: Why was arsenic not looked into in 1993?

Answer: Corps response—Arsenic was looked at, and sampling was performed. EPA Region III took split samples at the Points of Interest (POI) at the 1918 level. The elevated samples that are coming back now were found at surface levels instead of the 1918 level.

Question: What will the aerial photographs do?

Answer: Corps response—Aerial photographs will tell us where past ground scars were located. These may also show proof of activity over the surface, as well as stressed vegetation, which can be indicative of contamination.

Question: What else besides aerial photographs are you using in Spring Valley?

Answer: D.C. Health response—We are doing flyovers, which will show where arsenic may have stressed the vegetation. We are also doing surface and subsurface soil sampling and grid sampling at private properties and American University (AU).

Question: Can you clarify the numbers of homes that have been sampled?

Answer: Corps response—The Corps wanted to sample 61 properties, but only 42 were actually sampled. Some homeowners didn't want the sampling done for a variety of

reasons. The Corps was unable to contact other homeowners.

Question: When did you decide to do surface sampling versus composite sampling?

Answer: Corps response—To find where contamination is, the Corps did six-part composite sampling. Lots are divided into four quadrants, and a scoop of soil is taken from six random locations within each quadrant. All samples were taken from the surface to 6 inches in depth. The most likely exposure concern is within that layer. Vertical profiling is performed in each lot, at 1-foot increments to a depth of 6 to 10 feet, depending on the cut and fill.

D.C. Health response—A horizon of arsenic appears to be present at the 1918 layer. This would indicate a possible air deposit in the area around the lab, such as an experiment that exploded or went astray.

Question: What other chemicals besides arsenic were you looking for?

Answer: Corps response—In 1999, EPA was looking for a full suite of volatile organic compounds, semi-volatile organic compounds and metals. The only contaminant of concern was arsenic. At the Korean Ambassador's property, we also looked at three other metals—chromium, antimony and vanadium—but none were a concern.

Question: What level of arsenic is considered to be toxic?

Answer: Corps response—The EPA's emergency removal guideline level is 43 ppm arsenic.

CHPPM response—Arsenic is a naturally occurring substance and is absorbed into our bodies every day through food and water. Our bodies

protect us from toxic effects of background levels of arsenic. As we are exposed to more arsenic and our bodies can't detoxify it correctly, it can cause harmful effects. Health effects are determined by how much our bodies take in, not how much is in the soil. Arsenic has both non-carcinogenic and carcinogenic effects, both immediate and long-term.

Question: Are we at risk for ingesting arsenic by inhalation?

Answer: CHPPM response—There typically isn't a lot of dust being kicked up in this area that would be a concern for inhalation.

Question: Can one person's body composition make him or her lesser or more apt to be affected by arsenic?

Answer: CHPPM response—We process chemicals in the body through methylation. Some people methylate better than others for various reasons.

Question: Can arsenic migrate from soil to groundwater?

Answer: EPA response—Yes, it can.

Question: Is Nebraska Avenue the cutoff point for sampling?

Answer: D.C. Health response—We're sampling at the Points of Interest. We'll be looking at many other properties that show some elevated levels of arsenic.

Question: What is the process to determine any health risk?

Answer: Corps response—The process will apply once the grid sample results are back. We will use a risk assessment. This will determine the appropriate course of action. The course will vary from property to property, as there are varying alternatives for a response action.

Question: What other contaminants will you be testing for at the Child Development Center?

Answer: Corps response—We'll be testing for a full suite of chemicals, including volatile organic compounds, semi-volatile organic compound, various metals and about 175 compounds out of 220 compounds that were used at the AU Experiment Station.

Question: Has American University made the Corps aware of their 10-year plan that includes the

construction of new buildings on campus?

Answer: Corps response—Yes, they have. We have not yet discussed the specific details of their new construction.

Question: During the testing in 1993, there were suspicions that more was going on than the results showed. In the 1950s, when they built the radio tower at AU, some munitions were found. I think we're entitled to know the whole history of the Experiment Station and building of Spring Valley.

Answer: D.C. Health response—We are aware of an aerial bomb that was found during the construction of the radio tower but not any other munitions. As far as published history and documents, in 1996 a 175-page report was written on the history of the site. The report can be viewed at the D.C. Government office at 51 N Street N.E., third floor, between New York and Florida Avenue. The phone number is 202-535-2283; the hotline number with a recorded message is 202-535-1755. There is no need for a Freedom of Information Act certificate, however we ask that you make an appointment if you want to view the records. The Army has their records located at the Palisades Library.

Question: If arsenic might be a problem for everyone, why aren't you testing all the properties?

Answer: D.C. Health response—We're concerned with selected POIs. We'll take the issue of testing every property back to our decision-makers and work on that issue. Some of the POI testing was called open-air testing, where arsenic gasses were released into the air to see the effects on animals. This presumably deposited a layer of arsenic. What hasn't been established is how far and high the layer goes. Until we know for sure, common sense would say to not blow a lot of dust around.

Question: Does the District recommend residents getting outside testing done on their property if it's not included as a POI?

Answer: D.C. Health response—The District doesn't recommend one

way or the other.

Corps response—There are 12 or 13 property owners who have had their properties tested on their own. These results have come back with levels within the background range.

Question: Can the Corps recommend an outside testing company?

Answer: Corps response—No, for legal reasons.

Question: Is East Creek a POI for environmental sampling, and if not, can it be?

Answer: Corps response—Not at this time, but we'll look into it.

Question: What happens to the soil you're removing at the Glenbrook Road properties?

Answer: Corps response—The soil was drummed up, characterized, and if it was determined to be hazardous because of lead or arsenic, it was shipped to a permitted landfill.

Question: What were the levels of arsenic reported at the small disposal area at American University?

Answer: Corps response—The highest readings were 136 ppm arsenic, 24 ppm arsenic, and 1040 ppm lead. The background range for arsenic is 3 to 18 ppm, and I'm uncertain about the lead background range.

Question: Don't you think a health survey would be appropriate to see if arsenic might be the cause for some of the long-term illnesses and resulting deaths in Spring Valley?

Answer: D.C. Health response—We are compiling as much information as possible about illnesses in Spring Valley. Residents are encouraged to call us at 202-535-1755.

Question: Who can we address about doing a community-wide health survey?

Answer: D.C. Health response—That would be Dr. Lynette Stokes of D.C. Health.

Question: Why is the District handling this problem, when the U.S. government was the one who caused the problem?

Answer: D.C. Health response—We consider this a combined responsibility. D.C. Health is concerned with the health of District residents.

Question: Has ATSDR come to Spring Valley to do a health study?

Answer: EPA response—No they haven't come for a health study yet, but they have done some hair sampling.

Question: Are you testing for additional contaminants at AU?

Answer: Corps response—We'll be testing for a full suite of contaminants at the Child Development Center, as well as the Rockwood and Quebec properties.

Question: Is there any danger with basement occupancies?

Answer: Corps response—We'll have an answer by the next meeting.

Question: Have the streams in Spring Valley been sampled?

Answer: D.C. Health response—Yes, we've sampled the creek that runs behind the Korean Ambassador's house and into the Dalecarlia property. We followed the stream to its mouth and took sediment samples. We found no elevated arsenic levels—the highest level was where it meets the Glenbrook Road property and that was about 9 ppm arsenic. We've also conducted a macro-invertebrate study within the streams.

Question: How much manpower would you need to do the testing in a timely manner, such as about 30 days?

Answer: Corps response—There are 1,200 properties in Spring Valley, with about 22 work days in a month. It takes the sampling team about a day to sample one or two properties, and a sampling team is two people.

Question: Can you provide a section on your website that shows the most recent news and updates?

Answer: Corps response—Yes, we will provide a "Newly Added Project Information" section.

Question: Is there any concern with soil being disrupted and blowing around during the construction with the Miller Company site?

Answer: D.C. Health response—We don't see any immediate concern with that site at this time.

Question: Don't you feel that an interagency task force is necessary to make sure everything is coordinated? It seems that no one is in charge of

communicating information from one group to the other.

Answer: D.C. Health response—D.C. Health has had a successful partnering effort with the Corps and EPA. As we progress with this project, we plan to integrate as many groups as possible.

Question: Can we have a higher-level colonel representing the Corps to help answer questions at the next meeting?

Answer: Corps response—Yes, we'll have District Engineer Col. Charles J. Fiala, Jr. attend the next meeting.

Question: Can you tell me about the trenches at 52nd Court?

Answer: Corps response—The EPIC review of the trenches should be complete by the end of this month. We will give you the results as soon as we get them.

Question: I understand you were using an EM 31 magnetometer when you were searching for undetonated shells, and that this power level doesn't always pick up a lot of the objects. Are you planning to use a higher level magnetometer to search for more ordnance?

Answer: Corps response—The EM 31 is specifically used to look for burial pits or trenches underground. Since that time, the EM 61, which detects for individual items, has also been developed. In 1993, we were just looking for the burial pits, so the EM 31 was an effective tool for that application.

Question: Would ground-penetrating radar work better?

Answer: Corps response—Radar is not effective in this area because of the high clay content in our soil. It works much better in sandy, loose soil.

Question: I'm a resident of Quebec Street with young children. What would you do if you lived in Spring Valley? Would you have testing performed?

Answer: Corps response—I don't see a problem at Quebec Street and probably wouldn't have the testing performed.

D.C. Health response—We feel that most of Spring Valley is fine; however there are some specific,

finite areas of concern. Some common sense ways to protect your kids are to not put a sandbox on a bare area of soil or keep a sandbox with a plastic bottom. Try to teach your kids to wash their hands thoroughly.

CHPPM response—Also, nutrition is a very important part of allowing the body to methylate, or process, toxins efficiently. By practicing good eating habits, the body can methylate more quickly.

Question: Does our drinking water have arsenic?

Answer: D.C. Health response—We've looked very carefully at the drinking water records at the Dalecarlia reservoir. The arsenic level is the same as it is coming through the river north of Potomac, Md., at the intake. The water is tested as it moves out of the system and into the water mains. We're currently testing the water as it moves through the entire system.

Corps response—The tap water was tested at the Glenbrook Road property, and there were no elevated arsenic levels.

Question: Is hair testing an effective way to get kids tested for arsenic exposure?

Answer: CHPPM response—Hair testing is somewhat controversial. Urine testing can only detect arsenic upon immediate exposure, as arsenic moves out of the body within two to four days. Hair testing can catch excess arsenic exposure for 6 to 12 months, and it's possible to show elevated levels of arsenic in the individual's hair. The testing is very controversial, as the hair preparation and testing methods can vary from lab to lab and affect the final outcome. The hair must be cleansed of external arsenic to determine if it's actually in the hair itself.

Question: Have you tried to get Congress and Eleanor Holmes-Norton involved?

Answer: D.C. Health response—Eleven members of Congress sent a letter to the former Secretary of Defense asking that the cleanup of formerly used defense sites be included as a line item in the military



Department of the Army
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Baltimore District
P.O. Box 1715
Baltimore, MD 21203-1715

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budget. The new secretary is looking at the letter, as well. The letter mentions Spring Valley. Eleanor Holmes-Norton has an environmental staff member, with whom we have had contact and conversations. Hopefully, with her help and the other Congressional people, this issue can be pushed through.

Question: I think it's our duty to get deeply involved in this project by forming a Restoration Advisory Board and appointing a central core group of community members to review project updates, technical documents and other important information. We can become eligible for a Technical Assistance and Public Participation grant, as well as move the project along more smoothly.

Answer: Corps response—We agree that it's an important issue to discuss.

Question: Have you talked to anyone from the Horace Mann School? They have a garden that the students are involved in planting.

Answer: Corps response—We have talked with the principal, and because of the issues raised by concerned parents, we'll definitely take another look at this site.

Question: How do we alert former Spring Valley residents about the health survey if we know they've had family health problems?

Answer: D.C. Health response—Please call us at 202-535-1755 and let us know who you may have information on, and we'll get in touch with them.

Question: To whom do we direct questions about the right-of-entry forms?

Answer: Corps response—Contact Kevin Brennan at 410-962-6113, the project manager for the Sedgwick area, or Melissa Jones at 410-962-5166, the Corps' real estate manager for this project.

This is not a verbatim transcript of the questions and answers from the meeting.

If you have questions or concerns prior to our next meeting, please call the Spring Valley project information line at 1-800-434-0988 and leave a message. Or you may call the Corps' Public Affairs Office at 410-962-2809.

Meeting Notice

The next community meeting will be Wednesday, **March 14, 2001**, from 7 to 9 p.m. at the Metropolitan Memorial United Methodist Church, 3401 Nebraska Avenue. All residents are invited to attend.

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Baltimore Commander & District Engineer Col. Charles J. Fiala, Jr.
Deputy District Engineer, Spring Valley Maj. Brian Plaisted
Public Affairs Chief Lucy Lather
Public Affairs Specialist Doug Garman